

Like a bottle of pop and I wanna go off by dulcepericulum (keziahrain)

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Summary:

Steve and Billy but they're Geriatric Millennial grad students the mid-2000s. _(`)_/

Like a bottle of pop and I wanna go off

Author's Note:

Just had to get this out of my system, I guess?

Note: Consent issues due to alcohol consumption, but authorial intent is that both characters wanna be doing what they're doing. But they're drunk and confused and lack language to negotiate their interactions. Please avoid if this is (understandably) a triggering subject area for you.

Title from Let's Call It Love by Sleater Kinney.

Steve has no right to be jealous, or whatever. He and Heather are just friends. Sure, they had a fling last year, but it wasn't serious. They *agreed* it wasn't serious. Just a fun study break while working on their final project for Professor "Call me Joyce" Byer's seminar on special topics in modern art.

Still, it stings to learn that Heather has been secretly fucking Billy Hargrove, his roommate, for six months. Six months! That's, like, the whole last spring and summer.

Fuck.

Why does Steve feel so betrayed? Heather doesn't owe him anything.

But they had some good times, right? He remembers lounging naked in Heather's bed, her housemates out clubbing, the two of them doing impressions of Joyce lecturing intensely about contemporary light sculpture and the use of kinetics and color.

It didn't feel like *true love*, but it felt like *something*.

*

Steve doesn't feel resentful toward Billy, exactly. More awkward.

They're not close. They moved in together last fall after Billy answered Steve's post on the University's intranet searching for a roommate. Beyond some basic living habits, they have very little in common.

Billy is in the bioengineering program, doing stuff that makes very little sense to Steve, but which he takes very, very seriously. And when the guy's not in class, studying, or asleep, he's at work, or working out, or working off some steam at a party.

Or secretly fucking Heather, it turns out.

Maybe Steve feels so hurt because he feels stupid. Six whole months, and he had no clue they were together. Embarrassing, given that he sees Heather all the time.

To be fair, Billy is taciturn as hell and really hard to read, as intimidatingly blank as an empty Word doc the night before the paper is due.

It doesn't help that Billy is, in the immortal words of Zoolander, "really, really, really, ridiculously good looking."

*

Steve is pissed that neither Billy nor Heather could just say something to his face. When he's in touch with his anger, he thinks: *fucking cowards*. When he's consumed by humiliation, he thinks: *does everyone think I'm a fragile little baby who can't handle his friends hooking up?*

Steve found out about Billy and Heather 36 hours ago, and he's been boomeranging between these two attitudes ever since.

What happened is he ran into Tommy and Carol at the student union mailroom. Even though Steve doesn't share many values with them anymore, they've gone to school together for *21 grades*. There's no substitute for that kind of shared history. So they always chat when they cross paths. And the following exchange happened:

Carol: "Are you going to the football game on Thursday?"

Steve: "Nah, I got a big paper due next week."

Tommy: "You work too hard, man. You should come! I bet your roommate will be there."

Steve: “Yeah, probably.”

Tommy: “And he’ll bring his girl.”

Steve: “Oh, yeah? Who’s his girl?”

Carol: “You know, that girl on the swim team! You two had a thing, didn’t you?”

Steve: “Wait, not Heather?”

Tommy: “Yeah! Heather! So fucking hot. I guess they hooked up last spring.”

Steve: [appalled] “What?”

Tommy: “What?”

Tommy and Carol burst into sheepish laughter, and Steve walked away, furiously tapping out a text to Robin. She was free, and they rendezvoused at the cafe that looked like a Starbucks but wasn’t. Over half-caff mochas, no whip, she assured him that no one thought he was a bitter sensitive idiot who needed to be, like, shielded from reality.

“Okay, yes, I suspected they had something going on! Billy spends a ton of time at her house,” Robin admitted defensively. “I assumed you *knew*, and if you *didn’t*, I didn’t think you’d *care*!”

Steve stared morosely at the shiny varnished countertop and tried to maintain his dignity:

“I *don’t* care. All that much.”

“Uh-huh. I mean, I get it,” she said. “It’s hard not to have *feelings* when two such incredibly hot people in your orbit get together.”

“You think Billy Hargrove is incredibly hot?” he asked, surprised.

“Well, not really. But of course you do.”

“Shut up.”

“Whatever. Heather’s hot enough for two.”

And with that, she got a distant, dreamy look in her eye. And Steve couldn’t be angry with Robin anymore; she clearly had her own reasons for avoidance and denial when it came to Heather and Billy.

*

Steve and Billy haven't been home and awake at the same time since Steve found out about Billy and Heather. Not unusual at all: Billy keeps long, punishing hours, studying or partying late into the night, then up early at six o'clock, no matter what, to run or hit the gym. They're classic ships in the night exchanging pleasantries in the hallway.

Seriously, when did Billy even have time to fuck Heather?

That's Steve's first question, which he does *not* ask when he returns to their apartment, the second-floor of a two-story house, at seven o'clock on Thursday.

Steve stands in their tiny kitchen, gazing at Billy at the kitchen table. Billy's eating his bran twigs and unsweetened almond milk, dressed in a slim henley and sweats. His feet are bare.

He squints at Steve.

"Is that you, Harrington?" It's a running joke of theirs: they never see each other, so they forget what the other looks like.

But Steve's not in a lighthearted mood.

"Yeah, it's me," he responds flatly. "Don't cream your pants."

Huh. Steve's brain definitely could've chosen something less weird. Oh, well. An uncomfortable silence ensues. The spoon hovers at Billy's pink rosebud mouth, milk dripping back into the bowl. He blinks his thick eyelashes that remind Steve of an old-timey movie star.

Steve opens and closes his mouth a few more times, a puppet without a master. Finally, he says, "Thought you'd be at the game."

"Uh, no," Billy says. "Had some reading to do, so."

"Gotcha." Steve plonks down across from Billy at the rickety metal table, pulled off the curb on garbage day. It only seats two or three comfortably and positions them quite close. "You didn't want to go with Heather?"

"Huh?" Billy's shapely eyebrows furrow in confusion.

"You two are dating, right?" Steve asks casually, providing Billy an opportunity to share this data like it's not a big deal, which it isn't. No need for drama here. They're both adults.

Billy starts laughing like Steve said the most hilarious thing in the world. He's got a beautiful, melodic laugh. It almost makes him look like a new (equally attractive) person.

"Now you're just being an asshole," Steve hears himself say, even

though he probably shouldn't escalate.

“Where’s this fire coming from, Pretty Boy?” Billy speaks with a subtle undercurrent of warning, and a glint in his eye.

A sharp thrill ripples through Steve. Before this conversation, he’s never seen a strong emotion of any variety cross Billy’s face, and now he’s seen several in the space of a few minutes. Something feels off-kilter. He can’t quite figure out what, but he’s suddenly insatiably curious.

Perhaps that’s what moves him to do what he does next. He stands up, swings open the fridge door, and motions to a case of Sierra Nevada.

“Fuck studying. Wanna drink?”

*

Amazingly, Billy says yes. In over a year of cohabitation, this is the first time they’ve properly hung out.

They take the party to the front porch. It’s a mild October night, unusually warm. The transition seems to calm them both and provide a hard reset, putting them back on best behavior.

The conversation stays firmly in safe territory for a good long while: courses, professors, campus politics.

Steve already knows that Billy is smart. He's pleasantly surprised to discover that he's funny too.

He tells stories about his advisor, Dr. Hopper, whom Steve senses is a father figure to him. It's common knowledge that Dr. Hopper and Professor Byers are fucking. Steve has always found that guy scary as hell. It's amusing to learn the old man can barely send an email without the help of the department admin, Flo, or his teenage daughter, Jane.

Steve's also humbled to realize that Billy is kinder than expected, and a good listener, who attends avidly to Steve's dumb stories about his own program, asking intelligent questions like he truly gives a shit. (Not condescending questions along the lines of Steve's parents and their friends, à la "So what can you actually *do* with an art history doctorate?")

More than once, in organic moments in the conversation, Steve makes a point of bringing up Heather. He wants to demonstrate to Billy that he's cool with talking about her.

Billy just looks at him like he's insane and doesn't go for the bait.

*

They get smashed.

Later, Steve will not be able to reconstruct exactly when it happens.

But it happens.

The empties pile up around them, one crammed full of snubbed-out cigarettes. It's wild that a health nut like Billy allows cancer sticks past his lips; he's an annoyingly sexy smoker.

Steve doesn't really grasp how drunk he is until he's peeing over the side of the porch into the dead lilac bush. An indescribable swell of relief passes over him, drawing out a groan. He really fucking needed to do that.

Night has fallen, bringing clean, cold air. The weak light over the door casts a halo around the porch. Steve realizes it's quiet but for the white noise of traffic below. He glances over at Billy.

Billy doesn't meet Steve's eyes because he's staring straight at Steve's cock resting loosely in his hands, where he'd sort of forgotten about it.

Steve clears his throat and tucks himself away. The world feels honeyed, slow, faintly queasy.

Billy coughs, closes his eyes.

Steve fetches them some water.

*

Steve is still drunk, of course, when he gets in a confessional state. This doesn't always happen, but when it does, there's no reeling him in. He's embarrassed because he knows he only does this around people he likes, either platonically or romantically.

It's a gift, really. Just when he most needs to play it cool, he starts acting like someone drugged him with truth serum.

Tonight's topic? His academic angst and his parents.

"So yeah, I got myself tested in college," he tells Billy, who's observing him even more seriously than before. Steve can't tell if it's because Billy is compelled by his story or just really blotto. "And of course it's like, congrats! It's a dyslexic!"

He does jazz hands.

"Did you feel so validated?" Billy asks.

"Fuck yeah." Steve is warmed by Billy's understanding. "I figured out I'm not dumb. Or, I mean, I'm not dumb at everything."

“You’re not dumb at all, Steve.” Billy sounds almost angry.

“Well, uh. Haha. I got some support, and lo and behold, I’m not just a dumb jock, for sure. Turns out I’m actually kinda good at school.” Steve knows he’s blushing, not to mention babbling. “Really good, even, in certain subjects. It completely changed my whole relationship with academics. Like, my parents basically bought my way into college. No, it’s true! That’s a whole ‘nother story. But I realized I could earn my degree for real, not just flirt and cheat my way through as planned. I changed my major from business to art history. Thought my dad was gonna *murder* me.” He chuckles ruefully. “He still wants to, but I’m paying for grad school myself so he has no real excuse.”

Steve stops talking. This is a tender topic. He glances furtively at Billy, anxious to see how the other guy will respond.

Strangely, Billy doesn’t have a response. He’s muted, still, seeming to retreat into himself, and Steve worries that he’s overshared.

They’re sprawled on either end of the couch they found on the University’s electronic free board when they first moved in together.

Until tonight, that day was probably the most time they’d ever shared together, an afternoon spent maneuvering this big, busted piece of furniture up their narrow staircase. They didn’t talk much then, grunting and sweating and barking directions, neither willing to concede control to the other.

Steve may have guiltily admired Billy's ass a few times.

He'd felt hopeful back then, despite the lack of camaraderie, that they might be friends. Or at least *friendly*. But Billy disappeared almost immediately into his hardcore routine, and Steve took the hint quickly enough: this guy had priorities, and they didn't include his roommate.

Maybe he should take the hint in this moment.

Billy's silence is unsettling him.

Steve hauls himself to his feet. His beer-soaked brain sloshes in his skull.

"Well, on that note... I know we both have shit to do tomorrow. I think I'll call it a night." He yawns, considers. "Thanks for hanging out, Billy."

He really means it.

*

Steve does his bathroom routine, scowling at his reflection over the sink. His body and mind are not coordinating well, and everything takes longer than it should. There's a messy, unsatisfied feeling in his gut, but he feels powerless to do anything about it.

He's in his room, changed into a tee and boxers, when a soft knock at the door scares the crap out of him. When his soul has returned to his body, he shuffles over to answer. It can only be one person on the other side, yet Steve's heart still quickens to find Billy, blue eyes round with something like dread.

Yet another version of his roommate that Steve has never encountered before.

They stare at each other for a few long beats.

“Um, do you want to come in?” Steve asks, stepping aside.

Billy nods and comes in. Steve points blearily to his desk chair. Billy ignores him, planting his feet in the middle of the room. Steve shrugs and takes the chair instead.

“What’s up, Billy?” he asks.

Billy’s gaze focuses somewhere over Steve’s right shoulder, or inwardly perhaps. His fists open and close. Steve assumes they’re about to have some sort of confrontation about Heather, and feels adrenaline and alcohol go to war in his own system.

Then Billy starts to speak.

“My dad—he doesn’t get what I’m doing either.” His voice, usually so confident, *resonant*, is quiet. Cautious. Steve goes very still. “The whole higher ed thing makes no sense to him. He actually fucking hates it. Thinks I’m trying to join the coastal elite.”

“Um, we’re in Indiana,” Steve points out, grumpy and tired. “And didn’t you, like, grow up in California?”

“Doesn’t matter,” Billy says, and he sounds so *sad*. “It’s the principle of it. He says... he says I’m trying to be something I’m not.”

“So... what does he think you are?” Steve asks, and instantly regrets it. Billy physically reacts to the question, shuddering and closing his eyes briefly. Steve thinks the guy might still be really shitfaced.

“Trust me, you don’t wanna know,” Billy mumbles, and shit, he’s *crying*. Apparently, they’ve arrived at *that* stage of boozing and Steve didn’t even realize. It’s the real deal, too: Billy’s broad shoulders shake, and his face crumples; his blue eyes overbrim with tears.

A terrible thought occurs to Steve:

It shouldn’t be so fucking beautiful to watch Billy Hargrove cry.

Fuck.

Steve is exhausted and really not prepared for this. Something stirs in

him, and he looks away, chagrined by his own naked yearning. His heart breaks for Billy, it does, but why is this happening? Why is this gorgeous straight boy having an unscheduled breakdown in Steve's bedroom past his bedtime on a school night?

"Uh, have you tried talking with Heather about this?" Steve asks tentatively, wondering if he should text her.

"What?" Billy says brokenly.

"Just, like, maybe you should talk with someone you trust—"

"I don't know what to do with you," is the wretched, inexplicable response.

No wonder Billy is normally so contained and controlled. The guy has enormous emotions, and he doesn't seem to know what to do with them.

Their eyes meet, Steve baffled, Billy suddenly looking fiercely determined and slightly enraged. Steve finds himself standing up, as if to defend himself.

"Look, Billy—" Steve begins.

He's interrupted by Billy's mouth over his.

It happens so quickly, Steve's only reaction is to kiss back. Kissing Billy should be astonishing, but it's more like relief: a long cool drink on a hot day. All Steve knows is the delicious pressure of Billy Hargrove's lips; the wet tangle of their tongues; the gentle, occasional click of their teeth. He's breathing Billy's sighs, tasting Billy's tears.

And Steve's always loved making out, but this is next level, scratching an itch that Steve hadn't yet acknowledged. He feels the satisfaction in a bone-deep, full-bodied way, from his lips to his dick and back again.

And then dimly, though alcohol still clogs his mind, a little voice persists: they're drunk. They're roommates. Do they know what they're doing? Does Billy, in particular, know what he's doing?

Somehow, Steve forcefully breaks them apart. They gape at each other, panting like marathoners. Steve's attention centers, unhelpfully, on Billy's clavicle, visible through the unbuttoned collar of his henley. Fuck.

He *really* needs to concentrate.

“Billy! What—what are you doing?”

The expression on Billy's face is somehow desperate while also managing to communicate, *What do you think I'm doing? You're an idiot, Steve Harrington.*

And Billy's surging forward *again*, smashing their mouths together *again*. And Steve can't help but kiss back *again*, hands climbing the firm slope of Billy's back to pull him in, except.

Except Billy's shaking, *quaking*. Steve fights for air, struggles to hold Billy at arm's length.

"I really think—" Steve stammers.

Billy now flushes with the unmistakable crimson of shame, and that's not what Steve was going for at all. The lips Steve just kissed grimace in anger, and the body he just caressed tenses, as if preparing to fight. Steve tenses back, unable to do anything but mirror the overwhelming energies that radiate off Billy.

"Fuck you, Harrington!" Billy snarls. He pushes Steve away and makes to leave, and no.

Just *no*.

That's not what Steve wants.

It's obviously not what Billy wants either, judging from the obvious chub in his grey sweats.

Steve grabs Billy's arm.

And suddenly they're grappling. Or something. A sort of wrestling dance with no clear purpose, except maybe to bring them to the bed, which they hit in seconds, because Steve's room is so small. Their bodies pitch sideways onto the mattress, bouncing on landing. All things being equal, Steve would not have the advantage in hand-to-hand combat with Billy, but they're drunk, and he's got longer legs and arms, and Billy's not so much fighting Steve as fighting himself, writhing like he wants to escape his own skin.

"Hey! Settle down!" Steve demands, summoning an authority he didn't know he had. He gets Billy under him and drapes his body over him, pinning Billy's wrists over his head. Once they're face to face, their mouths in close proximity again, his commanding tone melts into something softer: "Settle down, settle down..."

Billy eventually quiets or just wears himself out. Blue eyes gaze up at Steve, begging, but for what? Then Billy bucks his hips, and it hits Steve like a bus: they're both rock hard.

"What, you want this?" Steve asks, not even sure what he means.

Billy barely nods, agonized, as if the question took a bite out of him. Frustration burns in Steve. He squeezes a bit harder on Billy's wrists, possessed by a totally unfamiliar confidence. It must be the booze.

"That's not good enough, Billy. You have to say it."

Billy closes his eyes.

“Say it!” Steve repeats, louder, giving his wrists a little shake.

“I want it,” Billy croaks, not opening his eyes.

“It” turns out to be Steve grinding down, hard, with his pelvis, while Billy strains up, and it’s like two live wires meeting: the high voltage shock almost sends Steve reeling off the bed.

But he breathes through it and continues to smash their groins together, finding an almost unbearable rhythm, their bodies joining in urgent union. Steve steers this unlikely ship, already bringing them home, the pressure building and building, his cock straining like it knows what to do, like it wants Steve to flip the body underneath him over so it can get inside Billy Hargrove right this fucking second, and then Billy gasps like he’s already being fucked, tears leaking again from the corners of his pretty, wounded eyes, and that’s what pushes Steve right off the cliff into a sweet, stomach-turning free-fall.

He makes an absolutely mortifying sound and can’t bring himself to care.

He slumps against Billy, a dead weight of endorphins and ejaculate.

He feels a hand come to rest gently on his shoulder blade.

He slips easily into a blissful doze.

*

Steve wakes to sunlight, a gurgling stomach, filthy shorts, and an empty bed.

He remembers nothing, then he remembers everything. A wave of panic, then he hears the shower in their shared bathroom.

Okay. Okay.

While his heartbeat slows, Steve gets up and searches for his RAZR; finds it under his desk. It emergently needs to be charged, but he flips it open to scroll through almost two dozen messages from Robin. How is she so good at T9? This is practically a novel.

He gathers that she and Heather hooked up last night.

It seems they may have misunderstood the nature of the Heather-Billy relationship.

Huh.

Across the apartment, he hears the shower turn off.

Steve has no idea what the hell is going on with Billy Hargrove. Clearly the guy has some issues.

But who doesn't?

In the cold light of day, it's clear: Steve needs to have a serious talk with Billy. *Sober*.

And hopefully kiss him too, if Billy will let him.